



BY MARTHA BASKIN
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Jeffrey Smith, author of *Genetic Roulette* and *Seeds of Deception*, talks about how the fight against genetically modified organisms is changing the future of food.

The presence of genetically modified organisms in the food supply has risen sharply since being introduced in 1996. Today 93 percent of soy, canola oil and cottonseed, 86 percent of corn and 95 percent of sugar beets have been genetically modified.

Leading consumer advocate Jeffrey Smith has investigated the proliferation of GMOs and written extensively on why they must be stopped and practical ways consumers can avoid them. Smith is author of *Genetic Roulette* and *Seeds of Deception*, and is director of the nonprofit Institute for Responsible Technology.

Martha Baskin: *How widespread are GMOs in the food supply?*

Jeffrey Smith: Well, it turns out there's only nine food crops that are genetically engineered but they're pretty widespread because soy and corn, in particular, are practically omnipresent in processed foods. Then you have sugar from sugar beets and canola oil and cottonseed, and those are pretty widespread. I would say 70 to 80 percent of the food sold in the supermarket has some derivative of genetically modified food crops. In addition, you have alfalfa, which is used as hay for animals, a little bit of zucchini, crooked neck squash and Hawaiian papaya. There's also a genetically engineered drug for cows that increases milk supply, but also creates a hormone in the milk that many doctors and scientists think is quite unhealthy.

M.B.: *Part of the reason you became involved in the non-GMO movement was because of the health risks associated with genetically modified organisms.*

J.S.: Absolutely. Food and Drug Administration scientists back in the early 1990s warned their superiors that GM foods might create unpredictable allergens and toxins and new diseases and nutritional problems. They urged their superiors to require studies but the White House instructed the FDA to promote biotechnology. So they hired Michael Taylor, Monsanto's former attorney, to be in charge of policy. His policy said biotech companies

A growing problem

Fifteen years since genetically modified foods hit the public marketplace, author Jeffrey Smith looks at the dangers of GMOs now coming to light.

like Monsanto could determine entirely if their own foods are safe. This is the same Monsanto that told us PCBs, Agent Orange and DDT were safe. They can tell us if their genetically modified corn, for example, is safe. But now, years after the FDA scientists were ignored, their concerns have been validated. The American Academy of Environmental Medicine says doctors should prescribe GMO-free diets to everyone. Several animal studies indicate serious health risks including reproductive problems, immune system problems, accelerated aging, organ damage and gastrointestinal disorders.

M.B.: *Who are the doctors associated with the American Academy of Environmental Medicine?*

J.S.: They're the detectives in our medical field. They're looking for new

disorders and diseases and trying to hunt down the cause; what's the new thing in the environment. They were the first organization to identify food allergies, chemical sensitivity, Gulf War syndrome, numerous things which later became common and well understood. So their being on the front lines makes it appropriate and understandable why they're the first of the doctors' organizations in the U.S. to condemn the use of genetically modified food in crops.

M.B.: *Could you describe some of the serious health risks?*

J.S.: When rodents were fed genetically modified soy they had changes in their reproductive organs, changes in the testicles, young sperm cells, ovaries. The DNA functioned differently in the embryo offspring. More than half of the

babies died within three weeks compared to a norm of 10 percent. There's some cases where the babies and litter size were smaller. In the hamster study, most hamsters lost the ability to have babies after three generations and some had hair growing in their mouth – so really serious reproductive problems. From the side of corn and cotton, some of those varieties are engineered to produce a toxic insecticide designed to break open the stomach of insects and kill them and is engineered in every cell of corn. So when we eat certain varieties of corn on the cob or certain products made from corn we'll have this toxin inside of us. Now it turns out that a lot of these safety assumptions that were used as an excuse to put this toxin into our food were untrue. The toxin appears to interact with us humans. It survives digestion and ends up in our blood. In fact a study that came out this year in Canada found that 80 percent of unborn fetuses that were tested had this Bt toxin in their blood and 93 percent of pregnant women had this Bt toxin in their blood. Bt toxin comes from Monsanto's insect-killing corn.

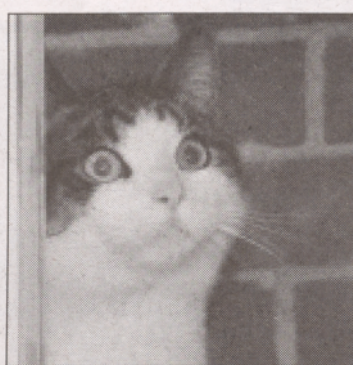
M.B.: *Let's go back to Michael Taylor. What happened after he was put in charge of policy at the Food and Drug Administration in the early 1990's?*

J.S.: He then became Monsanto's VP. Now he's back at the USDA and is the U.S. food safety czar. So he's the person that got GMOs into our food supply and he's now in charge of food safety.

M.B.: *When I watched a video of a talk you gave in Iowa, you asked the audience if they were going to let the government get away with GMO foods. You then answered by saying, "We have to do it ourselves." Is this really up to the public?*

J.S.: We know for sure that consumers have the power. They kicked GMOs out of Europe. A tipping point of consumer rejection was achieved and within about a week most major food companies there publicly committed to stop using GMO ingredients in their European brands. An outcry from moms in this country has forced many companies to get rid of bovine growth hormone from their dairy cows because it increases the amount of IGF1, a hormone linked to cancer. So it's been

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